



ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES ADVISORY COUNCIL

City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation

Regular Meeting

Cascades Golf Course - Clubhouse

Wednesday, February 8th, 2023

4:30 - 6:00 p.m.

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://bloomington.zoom.us/j/81051222551?pwd=cm1DRmJsOUthK0VuY0l5cGNIWDUwdz09>
Meeting ID: 810 5122 2551
Passcode: ERAC

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:38 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

ERAC Members: Bill Jones, Autumn Burnelle, Marne Potter, Angie Shelton, Dave Parkhurst, Denise Gardiner, Kim Brackemyre

Staff: Rebecca Swift, Joanna Sparks, Steve Cotter, Tim Street, Gillian Field

Guest Presenter: Kevin Tungesvick

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – December 2022

IV. AGENDA

A. Public Appearances

A-1 Public Comment Period

B. Old Business

B-1 Potential Leonard Springs Nature Park Expansion

Cotter provided an update on potential Leonard Springs Nature Park expansions. BPRD expressed interest in purchasing a portion of the 162 acre Hoadley property but it was purchased by adjacent landowners. BPRD will try to work with these new owners to improve park access as well as protect natural resources along the property boundaries. Cotter will meet with the new property owners to discuss potential future collaborations. BPRD is also interested in purchasing all or a portion of a separate 5 acre parcel to the north of the Park formerly used as a livestock pasture. A sinkhole opening into Shirley Cave is located on the property. A goal is to improve safety for students arriving to and departing from Leonard Springs Nature Days. BPRD is actively seeking funding internally and externally to purchase this property. Cotter said BPRD is prepared to make an offer but that there are competing offers for the land.

B-2 Interpretive Signs (RCA)

Swift is asking ERAC members for feedback on interpretive sign content for RCA Community Park. BPRD has recently hired a new graphic designer who will help with the signs' layout and procuring images. These signs are still being drafted and ERAC members will be able to review the final art before the signs are manufactured. Updating interpretive signs around City parks is a priority in the Department's Strategic Action Plan. RCA is top of the list this year because some of the signs there are in bad shape. They're either illegible due to weathering or include inaccurate information. BPRD is working to make sure that the all sign content is informative as well as accurate. Next on the schedule, BPRD will focus on developing signs for Griffy Lake Nature Preserve as well as replacing the signs at Leonard Springs Nature Park. Some replacement signs have been installed at Leonard Springs. The goal is to repurpose the existing sign stands whenever possible to reduce the cost and conserve resources.

C. New Business

C-1 Election of Officers

Swift asked if any ERAC volunteers would be interested in the Chair position that is currently vacant. Also, Angie Shelton is the ERAC Vice-Chair and that position is up for reelection. The Chair is responsible for proctoring the bi-monthly ERAC meetings and presenting ERAC's Annual Report to the Park Board once a year. The Annual Report is drafted by the Staff Liaison and reviewed by the Chair prior to the presentation. Denise Gardiner volunteered to be Chair. The motion was brought to a vote and ERAC unanimously agreed to elect Gardiner as ERAC Chair and Shelton as ERAC Vice-Chair for 2023-2024.

C-2 Griffy Lake Nature Preserve Deer Browse Study

BPRD contracted with Eco Logic LLC to conduct a three-year long deer browse study at Griffy Lake Nature Preserve which includes producing an annual report written by Kevin Tunesvick, Senior Ecologist. Tunesvick attended the February ERAC meeting to share the 2022 results. The annual deer hunts at Griffy are resulting in continued improvements in the understory vegetation. The woody plants continue to show less deer browse, but they suffered from some other environmental factors in 2022 that affected the data. The herbaceous indicator plants are increasing in height, which is to be expected with a decline in deer browse. Woody sapling data actually showed a slight decrease in height, but it appeared not to be really closely related to browse in 2022. Based on results collected in 2018, 2019, and 2020, there is a steady increase in vegetation height as the hunts begin to show some effect. However, height has leveled off the past couple years, which Tunesvick believes is a result of some mortality in that age class. Trees that are being monitored are around one meter in height and that age class tends to have a lot of mortality, especially under stressful conditions. There was considerable drought stress at the time of the survey this past summer. Trees were so drought stressed they shriveled and the average root collar diameter declined.

Jack-in-the-pulpit, a spring wildflower, is highly favored by deer. This species is a good indicator of deer browse pressure. Its roots are very sensitive to the compaction from the deer hooves as well as herbivory. Increasing heights were found from 2019 through 2021 in response to reduced compaction from hooves, and then a very slight increase in height in 2022. The best illustration of improvements resulting from reduced deer browse is the Solomon seal, another favored herbaceous plant. There isn't much change between 2018 and 2019. But since then, this plant species has shown steady increases in height, indicating a decline in deer browse and the strengthening of the plants.

The 12 research transects are distributed throughout the property. Two of them are in the southwest portion of the park, located on the south side of the lake. Three of them are in the northwest portion, located on the north side of the lake. And the remainder are scattered through the eastern two thirds of the park. Deer browse is heaviest in the Griffy Creek valley, upstream from the lake in areas where the invasive shrub privet provides abundant winter browse opportunities. Both invasive species infestation and an overpopulation of deer need to be addressed to prevent further degradation in the park. Tackling the invasive privet would reduce the availability of winter browse in the valley. Steve Cotter received verification from White Buffalo that they will be able to work with Parks and Rec in November of 2023 to host another controlled deer hunt on the property. The deer browse study will continue through the end of 2023.

C-3 Education Update

Brunelle provided outreach and education updates on behalf of Monroe County Parks and Recreation (MCPR). Brunelle attended a Facilitator Training hosted by IDNR for Project WET and Project WILD to host a workshop to train other educators on how to incorporate the lessons into their curriculum. Brunelle is partnering with other local interpreters to coordinate a "Day of Learning" for teachers to earn continuing education credits for participating in the workshop.

MCPR is co-hosting a Whooping Crane Ambassador Training along with the International Crane Foundation and the Sassafras Audubon Society (SAS) on Feb 28th at Karst Farm Park. The event is meant to train new volunteers on how to educate others about whooping cranes through table activities. Women In Nature Gaining Skills (WINGS) hosted their open house in January to kick off the 2023 program season and had more than sixty people attend. WINGS is supported by BPRD, MCPR, Hoosier National Forest, Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife, Indiana Division of Natural Resources (IDNR), Indiana State Parks-Lake Monroe, Indiana University Outdoor Adventures, and Sycamore Land Trust (SLT). Programs are meant to provide women with a low-barrier opportunity to learn new outdoor skills and experience recreational activities with their peers. The National Association for Interpretation (NAI) Great Lakes Region 4 Workshop will be hosted in Brown County State Park on March 20th- 23rd. The event is supported by MCPR, BPRD, IDNR, Indiana State Parks, Indiana University School of Public Health, and SLT. Brunelle also announced that the Karst Farm Greenway is now open from the park to Ellettsville. Long term trail goals include connecting the B-Line Trail to the Karst Farm Greenway.

Swift provided outreach and education updates on behalf of BPRD. Nature Day season will be returning on March 28th and 30th. Swift has already contacted ERAC members about volunteering to be Station Facilitators or for help recruiting high school students to be Group Leaders. BPRD is always looking for volunteers for nature days in the fall and spring because the program requires about 20 volunteers each visit. It is an onsite commitment from 10 am to 2 pm on Tuesdays and/or Thursdays. The programs are supported by grants from the Raymond Foundation and the Summer Star Foundation as well as MCPR and SLT. BPRD staff continue to add self-guided tours and market upcoming events on BPRD's mobile app, OuterSpatial. Tour topics include the long-distance bike route going from B-Line Trail to the Rail Trail, Heather Reynolds' IU biology class is going to develop a walking tour next fall, and finalizing the Bryan Park tree tour. OuterSpatial is free to download and is available on Apple and Android devices. MCPR recently got a license with OuterSpatial to add their data to the app too, so now users can find even more information on community parks.

In early April, BPRD staff will facilitate a lesson on water quality monitoring and promote the Adopt-A-Stream program at the Indiana Master Naturalist Class hosted by the Indiana Geological & Water Survey. Bird Fest 2023 has been postponed for now, it was supposed to be on Earth Day but SAS is looking at fall dates. Bug Fest can no longer be hosted at Hilltop Gardens & Nature Center because the IU Woodland Initiative planted several trees in an open area that was previously used for event parking. The Bug Fest Planning Committee is looking at alternate locations and hope to plan an event in the fall. This event is supported by BPRD, MCPR, Wonderlab Museum, and the Purdue Extension.

Gardiner provided an education update on behalf of SAS. They are supporting two additional educational opportunities this spring. There will be an Artists for Climate Awareness Bird Sketching and Painting Workshop at Ivy Tech on April 27th and Tiffany Kersten, who completed a "Big Year" in 2021, will present at Goose Pond Visitor Center on Sunday, May 7th. Meyer added that the 38th Annual Wildflower Foray would be held in Brown County State Park from April 28-30th.

Sparks concluded by mentioning weekly Weed Wrangles opportunities continue at Lower Cascades and Winslow Sports Complex. As part of the Habitat Connectivity Project, the Urban Greenspace Team continues to expand invasive plant management efforts in our parks. MC-IRIS will be hosting a plant sale again at Switchyard Park in 2023. BPRD will be hosting an Earth Day Weed Wrangle opportunity on April 22nd at Park Ridge East Park.

C-4 Jackson Creek Trail Extension Updates

Street provided updates on the Jackson Creek Trail Extension project. This project is led by the Engineering Department with the support of BPRD. While there is still some work to be done related to moving utility poles, the new section of multi-use trail is now open. The new trail section

runs from the roundabout at the southern edge of Sherwood Oaks Park for .5 mile south to Rhorer Rd. Engineering is working with Duke to coordinate the relocation of utility poles. Meyer asked about the side path conditions along High St and if there are plans to add signs that say "trail ends here". Street said he is not aware of any signs going in but there are future plans to the side path along High St. to 3rd St. which will improve conditions for bicyclists.

C-5 Griffy Loop Trail Project Phase II Updates

Cotter gave the Griffy Loop Trail Phase II update. The section of the Griffy Loop Trail that will cross the dam went out to bid last week. The trail will provide a connection between the north and south shore trails. The project also includes constructing a staircase from the gravel parking lot to the top of the dam so users no longer need to cross the spillway. Mader Design LLC provided the design plans for this project. Spectrum LLC was contracted to assist with the natural surface trail extension on the south side of the lake. Spectrum also provided BPRD with a Trail System Master Plan for Griffy Lake Nature Preserve. This report includes recommendations for trail routes and signage. ERAC members will receive a copy of this report before the April meeting. Shelton asked about fencing on top of the dam and Cotter clarified that there would be fencing along both sides of the trail as well as signs that prohibit going off trail onto the dam. Street added that there will be some parking lot improvements as well as additional trail signage. The goal is to complete this project by the end of the year.

C-6 2022 Urban Greenspace Volunteer Report

Sparks provided the background on the Urban Greenspace (UGS) Team and introduced BPRD's new Urban Greenspace Coordinator, Gillian Field. Field shared the results from the 2022 volunteer season. UGS volunteers focus on invasive plant control and native plantings. In 2022, 26 properties were managed and 178 volunteer events were hosted for a total of 3,138 volunteer hours. UGS hosts weekly and monthly Weed Wrangle opportunities as well as oversees the Adopt-A-Greenspace (AAG) program. In 2022, AAG included 21 properties and 42 participants for a total of 1,635 volunteer hours. UGS primarily partners with MC-IRIS and SICIM to host these opportunities and provide additional onsite herbicide applications. Field is looking forward to expanding UGS volunteer opportunities in 2023. Parkhurst asked if Field would be willing to share the presentation with the Environmental Commission at their next meeting because this relates to the Habitat Connectivity Project.

C-7 2023 Initiatives and April 2023 Meeting Agenda Items

Goat Farm Project, SYP Wetland Monitoring Report, Miller-Showers Management Plan, Bicentennial Tree Plantings, Lesser Celandine Management

IV. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was called to order at 5:58 PM.

**NEXT MEETING: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12TH, 2023
OLCOTT PARK– Young Pavilion**